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AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1-24. (Cancelled)

25. (Currently Amended) A nonwoven composite structure comprising: a plurality of layers of nonwoven fiber material ~~comprising a plurality of intermingled staple fibers~~, at least a portion of said layers of nonwoven fiber material being bonded together by ~~a plurality of~~ one or more discrete layers of heat activated adhesive extending in substantially sandwiching relation between said layers of nonwoven fiber material, ~~the nonwoven composite being characterized by a thickness of not less than about 8 mm and being further characterized by a density of not less than about 0.1 grams per cubic centimeter~~ said layers of nonwoven fiber material being further bonded together by the forced extension of fiber elements substantially across one or more of said discrete layers of adhesive such that a ~~first~~ portion of the fiber elements in adjacent layers of the nonwoven fiber material are intermingled with one another and with said adhesive in substantially continuous relation across the composite structure to define mechanical entanglement between said adjacent layers across substantially the entire interface between said adjacent layers, and ~~wherein a second portion of the fiber elements in each of said adjacent layers projects in extended relation into but not across a layer of adhesive between said adjacent layers~~ and wherein each of said layers of nonwoven fiber material consists of polyester fibers in combination with an adhesive constituent.

26. (Currently Amended) A nonwoven composite structure comprising: a plurality of layers of nonwoven fiber material ~~comprising a plurality of intermingled staple fibers~~, at least a portion of said layers of nonwoven fiber material being bonded together by ~~one or more~~ a plurality of discrete layers of heat activated adhesive extending in substantially sandwiching relation between said layers of nonwoven fiber material, ~~the nonwoven composite being characterized by a thickness of not less than about 6.3 mm and being further characterized by a density of not less than about 0.1 grams per cubic centimeter~~ said layers of nonwoven fiber material being further bonded together by the forced extension of fiber elements substantially across ~~a plurality~~ at least two of said discrete layers of adhesive between adjacent layers of said nonwoven fiber material such that a first portion of the fiber elements in adjacent layers of the nonwoven fiber material are intermingled with one another and with said adhesive in substantially continuous relation across the composite structure to define mechanical entanglement between said adjacent layers across substantially the entire interface between said adjacent layers, ~~and wherein a second portion of the fiber elements in each of said adjacent layers projects in extended relation into but not across a layer of adhesive between said adjacent layers~~ and wherein each of said layers of nonwoven fiber material consists of polyester fibers in combination with an adhesive constituent.

27. (Previously Presented) The invention according to claim 26, wherein said nonwoven composite is characterized by a density in the range of about 0.20 to about 0.55 grams per cubic centimeter.

28. (Currently Amended) The invention according to claim 26, wherein the staple fibers comprising said nonwoven fiber material are ~~selected from the group consisting of; polyester fibers, acrylic fibers, acetate fibers, wool fibers, aramid fibers, polypropylene fibers, rayon fibers and blends thereof and wherein~~ said ~~staple fibers~~ are characterized by a linear density in the range of about 2 denier to about 15 denier have an average length in the range of about 50 mm to about 105 mm.

29. (Currently Amended) The invention according to claim 26, wherein said ~~one or more~~ layers of adhesive comprise a dry adhesive.

30. (Previously Presented) The invention according to claim 29, wherein said dry adhesive comprises a meltable scrim fabric.

31. (Currently Amended): The invention according to claim 29, wherein said ~~one or more layers of~~ adhesive is activated in a selected geometric pattern such that a discontinuous adhesive bonding pattern is formed between adjacent layers of nonwoven fiber material.

32. (Currently Amended) The invention according to claim 29, wherein said ~~one or more layers of~~ adhesive comprises a scrim fabric of spun bonded construction.